

Book report on the freedom writers diary essay sample

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Ten years ago, *The Freedom Writers Diary* was published and soon became an international sensation. Today, more than one million people have read it, and they have even made it a motion picture starring Hilary Swank. As the freedom writers all graduated from high school and keep on advocating their deeds, the journey continues. Through the report I would like to divide them into four sections to discuss: origin, differentiation, motivation and education. *The Freedom Writers Diary* is a true story of Erin Gruwell and her students at classroom 203 of Wilson High school in Long Beach, California. Only at the age of twenty-three, it was her first teaching assignment to work with students considered “unteachable” by other teachers. It didn’t take long for Erin to find out that getting a higher GPA was not a priority for any of the students at room 203. Instead of worrying about their homework, students faced gunfire, gangs, drugs and so much more situations she could not imagine. Students then convinced that such fragile white woman does not deserve respect because she had never experienced violence, discrimination or hatred which happened every day in their lives.

One day, Ms. G intercepted a note being passed between students; the paper revealed a racist caricature full of hate– A sketch of a black student with huge lips and curly hair. Gruwell told her class that it was this sort of hate and misunderstanding that led to the Holocaust. To her shock, her students had never heard of the Holocaust. Therefore, she introduced her class to *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* and to *Zlata’s Diary: A Child’s Life in Sarajevo*. Through the books they learned to see the parallels to their own lives. In addition, a journal was given out to note down their thoughts, feelings, and whatever was going on in their lives. For the first time, she

caught the student's attention and also brought them interest in academics. To enrich the effect of the diaries, Gruwell came up with a "Read -a-Thon for Tolerance" as a fundraiser to bring Miep Gies, the Dutch woman whose family sheltered Anne Frank back in time to Wilson High. The class went on to receive immense recognition from the mass and also the government, hoping that people would find inspiration in their story of success.

Their efforts have paid off. It was nothing less than a miracle that all 150 of the Freedom Writers who were viewed as problem teens graduated from high school and made it to college. Were it not for Ms. G's strong determination and perseverance, such miracle would not happen; thus "The Freedom Writers Foundation" was founded to dedicate to recreating the success of room 203 in classrooms throughout the country. Now they are touring all over the world to share their stories with people, and most important of all, to get the marginalized heard. With mighty power from the students' own diaries and a narrative text by Erin Gruwell, *The Freedom Writers Diary* is truly an inspiring and uplifting example of how courage, hard work and determination can change tremendously for not one's, but a hundred and fifty students' life. When we think of golden state, where the story took place, the first thing that comes to our mind is probably beautiful beaches, gracious mansions and celebrities. However, it is nothing like that in freedom writers lives. For students like us who grow up in simple society with no obvious separation, it is so hard to imagine they grew up in a place with various races, causing riots in the streets. It is an environment filled with corruption, hate and discrimination.

It was also indeed dangerous for many of the students to walk to school from home, not to mention at night. Many of them lost their neighbors, friends and even siblings during their childhood. To them, innocent is far gone, never having the opportunity to simply be a kid. They said the Wilson High was like Long Beach, and Long Beach was like a prison. All of them are divided in separate sessions depending on tribes. There were little Cambodia, the ghetto, wonder great land and south of the boarder Mexico, that's the way it is, and every one lives with it. When one tries to cross the line, as if declaring what isn't theirs, the declaration of war begins. I did not understand ethnicism until recently. I was lucky to had a chance to receive street dance classes in Birmingham, UK in 2011, and there are some delicate discoveries I had found in the process. For instance, most of the students in the studio were native British, only a few were foreigners, and I was the only Asian in class. Even though it was not my first time abroad, but it is definitely the most vivid experience to date. In Taiwan, governments and educators keep promoting the idea of being “ globalized”.

The question is, how do you define a kid with global vision? Is it to have an ability of talking English fluently, watch BBC everyday morning, or, to be able to open one's mind and voluntarily help foreigners in need? All the mentioned above seems practicable for students whose mother-tongue was not English, however to those who were sitting in the studio, that was already a part of their life since they are native speakers. Looking back, I can still recall how immature and cold those native students were. Boys were dressed in jerseys and latest sneakers from stores, while girls were crazily heavy makeup and unbearable body deodorant. Fashion as they dressed, all

the looks and attitude they had, was almost barbarian. Even though the situation changed as we bonded in the process, it was so hard to believe that people would spend billions to go abroad and have education with them. Perhaps it was because none of us were grown-ups at that time, which makes the battles in the Freedom Writers Diaries more sensible.

Students were all from different races and they try to win respect at school. It could be the seniors who started the fight, and they just automatically became rivals because people want to protect their group. Suppose gang problems remain unsolved, I believe there is always a better way to solve the problem than engaging weapons, and by far Ms. G has come up with a good solution. Ms. G provided everyone in the class with Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young girl to start her lesson. At first the students resisted to read it, but eventually they were shock to find out how similar they are comparing to Anne. They felt as if they were living through a war without declaration; thus the students wanted to learn more about the Holocaust. Ms. G was shocked by their response and continued by having them read Zlata's Diary: A Child's Life in Sarajevo and a journal is given to everyone, so that they were able to take down what they have read and thoughts. In their journal they describe to you the horrors they faced including: gang violence, shootings, the murder/loss of loved ones and friends, the effects of drugs and alcohol, abusive relationships, molesters, and rapes.

They felt as though they were at a dead end with no way to turn around, until they met Ms. Gurwell. She could not believe the way they viewed their life and refused to accept it. In an attempt to change the way they thought

about themselves and each other, she decided to change her lesson plan to studying the Holocaust, hoping to teach them about tolerance. So far, I believe the motivation is clear: By reading those pieces, the students can gradually see similarities in between and thus tried to find a way out. Anne was about their age when she composed the diaries, so their state of mind could be linked together. Now that the students are eager for knowledge; their attitude have been more active, and their interaction among different races has improved. Ms. G went on to have her core group of students for all four years they were at Wilson, and continued to receive more kids as the years went on. Everyone wanted to be in her class because it was the one place people said they felt wanted, needed, and safe. They would become a family, and together have a lasting impact on the world around them. Hence, here comes to the last section- education.

Education is an admirable thing, but it is well to remember from time to time that nothing that is worth knowing can be taught. As their final project they were asked compile their journals, which had been keeping for four year, into a book of their own. They had something to say to people, they were not just kids in the classroom any more, they are writers with their own voices and stories. While writing this book they officially gain their name The Freedom Writers based off of The Freedom Riders, who were a group of American and African American student who rode on a bus through the South to protest against discrimination. The Freedom Writers had done the impossible, they had gone from a group of kids in a below average English class to published author, advocates for change, and people who believed in their bright future ahead of them.

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John F. Kennedy once said, “ Let us think of education as the means of developing our greatest abilities, because in each of us there is a private hope and dream which, fulfilled, can be translated into benefit for everyone and greater strength for our nation.” Through keeping a diary, the freedom writers went through not only a self-discovery, but a process of change. They realized Gruwell’s goal in education. It was not oppression or intimidation that brought them into books, it was liberation that determined. Their lives were no longer meaningless because their voice was finally heard. Keeping a journal might not be the most special teaching material to date, however the freedom writers were set free from being ignored, marginalized and discriminated. The identity crisis is gone because education took them to another stage of life—an independent individual who can stand up for oneself. When one can turn their anger and depression into words, it speaks louder than words, more fierce than titanium weapons, thus become bullet-proved.

I strongly recommend this book because it truly opens up your eyes to the world around you, grabbing your attention and refusing to let go. It was also genuinely inspirational. We are shut up in schools and college recitation rooms for fifteen years, and come out at last with a belly-full of words without knowing a thing. The things taught in schools and colleges are not an education, but the means of education. My parents were both teachers in college, so pursuing teaching was not ever my first thought. But after reading the Freedom Writers Diary, I was inspired. The best teacher is the one who suggests rather than dogmatizes, and inspires his listener to teach himself. Still you do not have to work on campus to be a teacher. As far as I

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am concerned, regardless of what position I end up in life, I know I would do something involving the empowerment of the youth, because they are the future of tomorrow.